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THE WHITE AFRICANS.

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THE

WHITE AFRICANS.

BY

'PARADIOS,'

FORMERLY HEAD OF THE NON-FOUNDATIONERS, AND CAPTAIN OF FOOTBALL, AT ONE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC SCHOOLS; AND SCHOLAR OF HIS COLLEGE, AND FIRST CLASS, CLASSICS, IN MODERATIONS, AT OXFORD.

Second Edition. Revised.

TINSLEY BROTHERS,
8 CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

1883.

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PREFACE.

AFRICA'S 'Monarch of Mountains,' Gambaragara, whose brow oft flashes with 'a diadem of snow,' shelters in its upper heights the remnant of a white race that once owned wide dominion, and gave dynasties to many of the neighbouring states, but whose origin is veiled in mystery. In their modes of thought, from the climate, doubtless, and character of their country—and it may be, possibly, from their origin also—they resemble Europeans; and

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the resemblance of feature is still more striking—their long brown or auburn hair, well-shaped nose, and thin lips, as well as their complexion, contrasting most strangely with the ordinary black African type. They are both symmetrical and handsome, and some of the women are exceedingly beautiful.

In former days the royal family and chiefs had considerable culture; and even now the race is specially celebrated for one branch of knowledge, in which, among many others, their forefathers excelled all the races round them—the art and science of medicine.

They were formerly possessed of a few horses (how or whence introduced it is impossible now to ascertain), and were able to preserve them from malaria, and also from the 'Tsetse,' or blood-fly, owing to the

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climate's coolness and the comparative absence of swamps.

Some generations ago, when their power and civilisation were at the highest, their then king learnt to read Coptic, or Arabic (for tradition has left this point in some uncertainty), from an aged chief who had wandered away from his native land and ended his days among the white tribe. And the book that he had brought with him was a copy of the Scriptures.

After a while there came vague rumours of a white teacher who had landed on the sea-coast, and the king, when he heard these, resolved to brave all the dangers of the long and unknown journey, and went forth alone to find him.

Very many and great were his hardships and perils; but at last to his joy he succeeded in the search. Questions on both

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sides had been asked and answered; statements and expostulations had ensued; and then the missionary addressed him, in effect, as follows.

NOTE.

The Metre, except in the Lyric parts, consists of four Anapæsts, varied occasionally by a Spondee in the first foot.

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THE WHITE AFRICANS.

[*N.B.—The Introduction* should be read through before the Poem.]

Part I.

THE ARGUMENT.

To the King of the White Africans, the missionary proclaims the alternative—Wife or Heaven. Which then, for the love of Heaven, is to be cast out forsaken and dishonoured? The Queen; or Isa, whom the King (as he himself describes) had once snatched from the death-stroke, and whom he had sworn to protect ever, and cherish, even as he had sworn to cherish and protect the Queen. His decision is made.

"CHOOSE thou Hell, pang and terror of Hell, and
thy wife;
Or the gift of God, rapturous, limitless life!
For the worm is their doom, and the ravening fire,
Who cleave unto children, wife, mother, or sire,

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And for these slight, and spurn, yea, anew crucify
Christ the Lord. Rather lop the hand, pluck out
the eye ;
Pluck, if need be, thine heart out : such pain heralds
bliss :
But ponder God's fury, damnation's abyss,
Hopeless horror. Heat's torment thou knowest,
full well ;
Yet the fire-blasts of earth would blow cool amidst
Hell !
Thou hast seen man's dead body flung out to
decay,
By the worm and the reptile's tooth eaten away.
Didst thou shudder? Why shudder? Those
limbs feel no throe ;
Neither anguish nor horror the carcases know.
But in Hell wouldst Thou lie, stark and loathly as
they?
While the foul shifting worm-clusters batten, and
play,
Within Thee and through Thee ; thy Self's life,
thy Soul,
Ever knowing, and seeing, and feeling the whole,
Being one with that carrion aye unto aye !
Well mayest thou shudder !—Then put her away !"

. . . . . .

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Dumb in pain, and in wrath, and a strange wond'ring woe,
Stood the monarch. No terror of earth, nor death-throe,
Could have shaken his soul thus; but infinity
Of corruption, and life knit to death-agony,
Smote, and cowed him, and left him a moment untrue:
Then he started, and wildly his heart's cry outflew:
"O pitiless Priest of a terrible God,
Trampling hearts as the river-horse tramples the sod,
Is torture's wail praise? From a land far away,
Soul-weary, in peril of death day by day,
I have sought thee; His blessing to crave, and His sign,
And to tell thee the hopes of my people were mine;
For I deem'd your God Champion of love and of truth,
Oppression's avenger, Rewarder of ruth:
Thus His word; and methought, 'The Priest's voice is the same.'
And now, lo! thou criest to me in His name,
"Cleave the true trusting heart with a dastardly blow,
Or thine are Hell's measureless ages of woe;

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Do a coward's, a traitor's, a perjurer's deed,
And thine are Heaven's raptures, the Christian's meed!"

. . . . . .

Should I cast back my Consort, disgraced, on her kin,
And tell them the New God rejects her as sin?—
My honour'd, my loved one, would die in her shame,
And her soul be flung forth to the worm and the flame
(Her soul if not mine); for thy Saviour-God's name
Would ring as the cry of a curse in her ears.
My people, distraught amid passions and fears,
Would abjure Him whom now they were fain to receive,
And turn to their idol-fiends. Could they believe
He is better than They; is the true God above,
Who, called God of love, is the Slayer of love?
Must She, once the pledge of close league and accord
To the white royal houses, be set as a sword,
Though guiltless, to sunder and slaughter? Her sire
Would in wrath waste our frontier with spear and with fire,
Nay, strike to the land's heart, for vengeful is he:—

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But that havoc would rest on thy God, or on thee!

. . . . . .

Or wouldst thou I spurned, as accurs'd, Her who clings
With the clasp of the floweret that draws her life-springs
From some tree-stem, and strains it with passionate hold;
Then breaks into flower-showers, and binds fold on fold
Of beauty around it, her life-source and stay?
Wouldst dissever her, Priest? thou must tear, crush, and slay.

. . . . . .

Four full years agone, when my grandsire was king,
I afar on the marches, with leopard-like spring
The plague pierced our tribe's throat, and lapped life; a cry
Wailed to Heav'n, but no succour came down, no reply:
Then the Priest spake, 'The Gods have forborne with us long;
Ye joyed, and forgot them—ye die for the wrong;
Go ye, seek ye the shrines, let the altar-fires blaze,
Heap off'rings, and blend supplication with praise;
It shall not suffice: human blood, human flesh

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Will the Gods have; a life sweet, and beauteous, and fresh,
The purest and loveliest maid of our race.'
The crowd clutched the hope, but my grandsire's stern face
Met the Priest's face half-doubting; but sore was the need,
For his people died; grimly he bowed to his creed;
The creed our sires caught from the dark nations round
(For our own had been lost in time's mystic profound).
'Be it so,' he said slowly. Loud cried the High Priest:
'The seventh morn, my children, we keep the God's feast!'
News came to the camp; the troops clamoured to go,
And I gave hundreds leave, but I cared not to know
What was done. Would they butcher the fairest and best?
'Rather sweep off,' I mutter'd, 'whole swarms of the rest.'
But it was not for me to decide, or rebel;

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The Priests chose their victim, and guarded her well.
Late the sixth day one told me the doom'd maiden's name:
Could it be? O curs'd idol! His child? His? Whose fame
Was my country's; who train'd me and led me to war;
As a father I loved him my fame's guiding star.
And she, my bright playmate in days of the past,
So unearthly in beauty, so fragile; the last
Little shoot of that grand hero-stock that had stood
The strength of the kingdom through ages of blood.
Must the knife gash that breast? Must the merciless fire
Eat the still quivering limbs? Must her race thus expire?
Too late to entreat; and, my troops now so few,
Too late the fierce thought that surged up, to shear through
The power of the priest with the edge of the sword.
. . . . . .
I was madden'd; must act; and at once went the word
That my horsemen (you start; we have good steeds and fleet)

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Should arm them (they numbered a score), and should meet
At the fringe of the forest in rear of the camp.
I joined them; gave orders; the long slashing tramp
Broke steadily onward o'er hillspur, down steep,
Through gorges and torrents that whirled with a sweep
Like our own. Then the darkness came swift as a blow,
Yet nor stagger'd, nor stay'd us; through blackness we go.
Soon we sank with a jerk; for the deep, holding mire
Had engulfed us (I knew then the true track was higher).
Our chargers plunged, strained, and were freed; caught again;
And anew loos'd; they stagger'd to land; all but twain;
Then with hiss of the stream, through the gloom, as we pause,
The metallic clash rings of a crocodile's jaws.
On we sped; cactus pierced, aloes drove with fell force
Their poniards bone-deep into horseman and horse.

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One a climber's coil snared with a lasso-thong's strength;
Flung headlong it lay, with snapt shoulder, full length;
While the lion's roar boom'd through the drear jungle-cries.

. . . . . .

Oh, joy! the moon's scimitar waves through the skies,
As though a God brandish'd his glaive for the fight;
And as though it had thrown living sparkles of light;
Sudden stars flash around; and in safety we ride
Through a plain well-nigh boundless. Our steeds' breath and stride
Grow short; yet no end is neared. Thus in our dreams
Moves our road as we move, like the flowing of streams.

. . . . . .

All at once our eyes shrank in the sun's red-hot glare,
That mock'd, as the idol's own devilish stare

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Gleams forth from the flame-spurts that roar and consume,
When man's burning flesh chokes the air with its fume.
Fell sign. Rather plunging than galloping now,
Our barbs flounder'd up to the city's hill-brow;
And we saw far below us the streets flowing full,
Houses deck'd; shouts were surging; and then came a lull;
And the roll of the death-drum! Sharp-smitten our steeds
Sprang forward, their haunches all quivering like reeds;
Some rock'd o'er on their side, or were hurl'd on their head,
And a rider was flung straight before me stone-dead.
And as mere trunks, of limbs reft, perforce hurried down,
Sped they down the descent, and in through the throng'd town
(How I know not), and on to the temple-court's square.
On foot in a moment, my dagger's point bare,
I clove the jamm'd mass. Rose the Priest's choral chant,

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And the victim (I noted her bosom's sharp pant)
Passed white-robed and garlanded, full in my view.
Tier on tier I had pierced; should I ever break through?

. . . . . .

By the altar-stone now, with the Priests marshall'd round,
Cower'd the maiden, her bosom laid bare, her eyes bound.
'Sovereign Lord of our lives, lo! our fairest we give;
Take the ransom, and suffer this people to live:'—
Thus their chief pray'd, and stretch'd forth his hand to the steel:
For an instance did brain and limb helplessly reel,
But my eyes, as the dead's eyes, were fixed, where the swell
Of the snow-disk must break in blood. Ere the knife fell
I had sprung to my eye's mark, had burst the last ring,
Had reach'd her, and caught her, and quick with a swing
Set her safe, as the knife hiss'd for gore and flash'd past.

. . . . . .

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Then roared a demoniac yell-burst, and fast
With axes and clubs leapt the priests from the shrine;
Shouts answer'd; my horsemen's: and by me were nine.
Our arms stay'd the rush; the dusk gleam in my eye
Told the Hierarch he would be first that would die;
And he drew back: and sullen they faced us and still,
While the multitude's gaze sought the slope of the hill
Where the king's throne was girt by the powers of the land;
There the Pontiff harangued with wild jerks of his hand,
And the nobles gave counsel. But ere the King spake,
In masterless fury the mob's stupor brake;
Yet clear came his voice; through the people it ran:
'Let the Prince take the girl; or the Gods, if they can!'
Heaved the throng, shrill'd dread death-cries with crashing of blows;
And myriads, maddened with blood-thirsting, close

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In upon us. I glanced at my lately-won prize
So soon lost again, so I deem'd: eyes met eyes
(For the bandage had dropped). In her glance was no dread:
'I shall die not all lone,' was the first thought I read;
Then a change came, a sad, yearning, shuddering gaze,
Saying, 'Must thou, too, die in the midst of thy days?'
And in light on my spirit that sweet look was brent.
As I lifted my eyes the mass writhing was rent;
Out-flashed horrent blades; hopeless, waiting the end,
I held her; and, lo! 'twas the hand of a friend
That wielded each war-axe; for at the king's word
Had the soldiery dashed to the help of their lord.
Weapons hacked, javelins, thick as blood-flies on a fen,
Sung, and found them soft rest in the bodies of men;
Through the court's press, through alley and street we cut sheer;

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Then, firm as the thrust of a home-driven spear,
Through the loose shifting crowds sped we clean without stop,
And bore her unharmed to the city's hill-top.
There the foe melted from us. We halted awhile;
And there, in the face of the troops and Heaven's smile,
Full in sight of the swarming tumultuous town,
With privy consent sought and gained from the crown,
While sun-flushed the high mountain-summit of snow
Threw its glory far downward to greet us below,
By our land's ancient laws, by the oaths that abide,
I took her—my own, Second, true, honoured Bride.

. . . . . .

Yet even in camp, every day, nigh all hours,
My soul felt dread's clutch through the priests' serpent-powers,
For they wrought still to pluck forth her life for their God.
Last year, when the king's death gave sovereignty's rod
Unto my hand, I summoned their whole priestly caste,

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And spoke: 'The king warns you, forget ye the past;
Her life is as yours; mar one lock of her head,
Ye who feed the flames living shall feed the flames dead!'
Henceforth neither open nor secret attack;
But those years of suspense! as taut cords of a rack
On the heart-strings; that oft as my foot left her door
Drew sharp, and my throat filled with salt taste of gore;
Lest, returning, I found Death before me within,
Found for flesh as of lote-flowers a livid corpse-skin;
Or, for love's tones, heard shrieks from black lips shrivelled up
Through the dirk's poisoned wound or the fanged venom-cup.
What marvel my life seemed to live in her frame!

. . . . . .

O man, oh God's mouthpiece, wouldst fling her to shame?
Wouldst tear out her soul's faith and love? By my hands?

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Must I cry to her, 'God, dread and holy, commands;
I renounce thee as vile, oh, once purest and best;
I stamp thee to Hell, while I spring to Heaven's rest.'
(Ah, Lord God, that the knife ever missed its blood-quest!)
Lied the Word, saying, 'Christ welcomed all whoso came?'
Lo, my welcome is soul-stabs, hers soul burning flame!
We deemed that His heart's beat was love: that His heaven
Was blurred, marred, without us. I freely had given
To the God-Man I imaged my kingdom, my life—
Be it hell, be it heaven, I cleave to my wife."

. . . . . .

Cold and hard, as he flung down the torturing choice,
Had the Priest's words out-tolled, and as fate was his voice.
But anon, as the tideswell of passion and grief
Tore its way, seething forth from the heart of the chief,

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Pity's sealed deeps were stirred in his own human soul,
And tossed; as the frozen streams waken and roll,
By the Spring's warm touch quickened and loosed from the tomb.
'Must it be?' Thus his heart asked, 'Must Hell be the doom,
Be the wages, of Truth? Is it Christ-like? or just?
Are they naught, too, these women? Mere passionless dust,
Without worth, without rights?—"Without Soul," says the Turk:
Were it so, God, less deadly, less ghastly, my work!'
But as these strive, fresh thoughts rush, a keen, icy breeze,
'Habit, home-laws, church-code;' and the soul's instincts freeze,
And his body is ice to the numb finger-tips;
Then as cleft by a wedge-stroke his marble-like lips
Sprang apart, "I have set Death before thee and life:
And, behold! thou hast put away Heaven for thy wife!"

END OF PART I.

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Part II.

Isa awaiting the return of the King, her husband: the perils of the homeward journey; flood and savage foe, mountain and jungle, deadly reptile and ravenous beast.

HER eyes worn with watching, her heart faint with longing,
Tortured lest weary thoughts' wand'rings were wronging
Him her whole body and spirit adore,
Isa sank low on her palace-room's floor.

. . . . . .

"Our hope, the life-issues," she moaned, "yea, thy danger,
Husband, seem phantoms. God, well-nigh a stranger
Yet surely merciful, pardon this thing;
Thought like a flying dove shot through the wing,
Beats, beats, and whirls helpless.

. . . . . .

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But, strong for all duty,
Calmly the queen moves (that calmness is beauty),
Calmly does all things as though He were by.
Can she love truly, and wholly, as I?"
She rested a little while mute; then upspringing
Flung forth her voice as a chief's war-bells ringing;
"Yes, I must sing me the song he once made;
While with my eyes, mouth, and tresses he played:

'Listen—the call of a clear little bird-voice*
Chirruping, "Follow, oh follow me, come."
'Why should I trust to a tiny bird's guidance?
Where will it lead?' 'To the sweet treasure's home.'
Call, little honeybird,
Flutter and call.

'If I should hesitate, falter, or loiter,
Will it lose patience, and take wing away?'
'No, it will flit before, then back, then onward;
Coaxing, if need be, the whole live-long day.'
Call, little honeybird,
Flutter and call.

* See the account of the Honeybird in Stanley's or other African Travels; it will also be noticed that Africans have a turn for improvising ditties.

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'If then I follow wherever it leadeth,
Is success certain, and worthy the prize?'
'Failure there cannot be; food there for hunger,
Sweet to the taste, and joy to the eyes.'
Call, little honeybird,
Flutter and call.

"Call My Own Darling; I follow, I follow;
Dangerous or rough the road, mine willing feet;
Thou art my luring voice, Thou my conductor,
Yea, and my aim and prize, Thyself, my sweet."
Call, my own Love; I come
Ere thou canst call.'

"I call thee," she cried, "come, my Husband, my own!"
And e'en while her cry as a javelin was thrown,
He, away from the Priest, in the torture and whir
And wrath of his spirit, was fleeing to her:
All his soul and life yearning in desolate pain
For the voice of his darlings, for love's touch again.
Three days he fled, 'wildered, and blinded: at last,
By marshes ringed round, faced by floods bellowing past,
He stopped: and the Priest's Word, like witchcraft's blind haze,

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Floated off from his soul now ; he saw, in amaze,
He was far from the track, with death's hazard in front,
And behind foes as jackal troops roused to the hunt.
In he leapt; the swirl's buffet stuns hearing and sight,
And his thews are as straws in the plunge of its might,
As it slings him away. Effort, hope's self, seems vain,
But the stress strangled woe, and not life, but life's pain.
Down below, the stream-sluice, with a scream and wild toss,
Shook a wood-giant's ruined bulk flung far across ;
And at once he was hurled on a bare stake-like bough,
And clutched with numbed hands, while on mouth and on brow
Crashed the tree-antlers. Well that they guarded the trunk
That had brained him else ; quick his hand caught ere he sunk ;
There he clung, and was safe ; but dark forms on the shore

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Waved their arms, but their cries died amid the flood-roar,
Then a gleam shot above, and to left, and to right,
Upon river and tree swooped the thick arrow-flight;
And a point ploughed his wrist—his one life-chance again
Was the flood's hap; he reached with his whole body's strain,
And with grasp deftly shifted, the branches' ring's verge;
Loosed hold, was plucked down, and swung lost in the gurge.
Then his face rose, and glared as a strangled man's face;
And passed, as a dead thing shot down the flood-race.
And verily Death had been his, if the banks
Had not ere long crouched down, till, flung out on both flanks,
The torrent self-broken lay calm as a mere;
He is slowly borne shorewards, strives feebly, is near;
Ah, he sinks! No, one last effort more; he feels ground;
Falls; but sways up; and falls; but creeps past the lake's bound.

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It was well he was counted as dead by the foe,
So they followed him not; for the hours come
and go,
And he lies 'mid the reeds' flicker lifelessly still,
As a rock fragment couches, lone, desolate, chill.
. . . . . .
At the last, as a rock moves by force not its
own,
Slowly moved the king's limbs, and again lay as
stone.
But a throe came; his eyes oped, and stared fixed
and wide,
And the past o'er them slid, as a stream's drowsy
tide;
And he seemed to again journey seaward; he rode
Thro' thicket and fen, while his whole spirit glowed
With the high hope and yearning to win and
to bear
God's full blessing home. Then once more in
despair
Seemed he watching the dulled dying gaze of his
horse
By the swamp's breath slain; then turning sad
from the corse,
To be riving on foot through the jungle once more;
Till at last awed yet joyous he heard the sea roar.

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And as one who has wrought for some nigh hopeless prize,
And has won it, exulting he met the Priest's eyes;
And they gleamed, in his trance, with the pitiless glare
Of the Idol-Fiend's Self! As noosed birds strain the snare,
So he struggled to break through the dream; and it passed.
But a fresh vision comes, like and unlike the last.
All the long homeward journey was ended, he dreamed,
And the sweet faces (never more sweet had they seemed)
Laughed a welcome. But e'en as the smile played, each face
Shivered troubled, and failed; and forth flashed in their place
The Priest's eyes wrath-fired.

. . . . . .

Roused, he sprang, won his feet;
But he reeled in the waves of Gehenna-like heat;
Yet he threw himself full on the brake's circling teeth,
Thorns above, thorn and sword-grass and cactus beneath;

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Torn he passed through; and through, with sheer
weight turn and twist,
All the thicket, that oped now, now shut; while a
mist
Crawled heavy with venom; and plants as he
trod
Spat up stench from the foul leaves that speckled
the sod;
Ants clung stinging; mosquitoes stabbed arms,
face, and throat;
And the blood welled and dripped where the
gadfly's barb smote.
Hideous things stirred around and beneath; lizard,
asp,
Toad. and scorpion; and once, with a bull in its
clasp,
Writhed a python before him; its eyes' burning
ring
Was upon him; and swiftly, as if for a spring,
From the crushed, huddled mass it unwound spire
and coil;
Then, with one glance of doubt, back it turned to
its spoil.

. . . . . .

On he dashed himself. See! in a moment wide ope,
As a door, stood the jungle; and slope after slope

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Swelled out, and then hid. Sparkled flowers of all
dyes,
And with life, bright as flowers winged or gems,
earth and skies
Were all movement and colour; and where the
trees' grace
Would be charm's crown, their columns and frond-
age had place;
Near him two slight forms tow'red leaning each
toward each,
Whose boughs flowed as robes, and as sound of
love-speech
All their murmurs; a grim giant there; there a
grove,
Where like athletes the thronging stems twined
limbs and strove;
And there, to what seemed to the upmounting sight
But a needle's point, down through a hundred
yards' height,
Evermore widening evenly out round on round,
Till the dark branches' tips flickering high o'er the
ground,
Feather-like, made a tent where a king's court
might rest,
A mimosa stood clear on the fairest knoll-crest.

. . . . . .

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The beauty he felt, but scarce saw ; he was free,
That he saw, and his soul cried : 'Lord, is it of Thee
That the heart of man lying, saith, "God's eye is Hate,
His arm Wrath?" Thine eye smiles ; the prison-house gate
Has been surely flung black; the hand surely is Thine.'
Then with body refreshed, and heart nerved by the sign,
Onward sped he, still onward, and came as night fell
Where a strong village guarded a maize-dotted dell,
And was sheltered ; but no, not from fever's fang ; morn
Danced blithe on the home path, when, powerless and worn,
He essayed to go forth, and fell ; day crept ; night ; day ;
And night ; with the next morn he crept on his way.
Unimpeded he rose, by ascents scarcely felt,
To a smooth mountain-arch, where the health-breezes dwelt

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For ever, it seemed; and there lingering, he slept;
And awoke and was strong; while the blood-eddies leapt
As from wine-draughts.

. . . . . .

Henceforth, though days gathered to weeks,
His strength held, and bore him through chasms, o'er peaks,
Past the multiform barriers and snares of the way,
Over reptiles' fangs oft, close to gaunt beasts of prey,
And the tusks of the boar, and the unicorn's horn,
And the monster whose bulk breaks as stalks of the corn
The stems of the forest. A robber-tribe's keep
Threatened murder; anon 'mid crops, fruit-trees, and sheep,
Frank welcome was given by a peace-loving race:
And a few leagues thence bones and black hummucks left trace
Of hell-deeds. Now full seven months had been lost
Through the Priest's blinding word ere the true track was crost;
Wasted months, precious, yea, beyond price, to the King.

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But with fresh hope he sped now: his long wandering
Drew fast to a close; yet must much still be borne;
And with stout heart he bore it: from eve unto morn,
And from morn to eve, death-girt by men and by beast,
He from deluge to drought toiled, from famine to feast;
Till a dim image, flecking the crystalline sky,
Like shadowy robes of the land's deity,
Grew forth: and he knew his realm's fastness and pride,
The snow-mountain's form where his loved ones abide.

END OF PART II.

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Part III.

Home; Treason; the King and Queen and Isa; the Appeal from the Priest's Word to God's Word: heartpeace.

Do their hearts feel him near them? As his do
theirs leap?
Like the features of one who walks forth in deep
sleep
Was the Queen's pure face, grown slowly fixed with
the strain
That on feeling and nerve sharply drew bit and
rein,
Lest the hearts of the loyal should faint at her
dread,
Lest an act should be unwrought, or word be un-
said
That her love's King could wish done or spoken.
In her
Dwelt the spirit of Him, the condemned prisoner,

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The patriot chieftain, who, curbing by will
Limb and feeling, goes forth, while the mob gaze their fill :
Having bravely fought, kept stainless faith to his fall,
Now bravely he answers his manhood's last call.
Yet he fears, fears lest strength or sense sink in a stound,
Or a nerve twitch, or foot fail to grip on the ground.
Hark ! The crowd watching, buzzing with rage or applause,
Mutter 'Calm : How calm !' Some breathe,
'True Hero, true cause.'
Ah ! endurance unbearable : will and flesh shock,
And his rest (he craves for it) lies yonder ; the Block !
Thus the Queen moved.

. . . . . .

But Isa's soul's passion-powers veer
(Hope at times crushing fear's strength, at times quelled by fear),
And a look gathered, born of these changes of change,
So that whoso beheld her face thought it not strange,

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That he felt all its charm, but marked only large eyes,
Now appealing, now bright'ning, now full with surmise;
Hazel, liquid eyes, splendent with life; vivid-clear,
As tear-drops, could light and soul dwell in a tear.

. . . . . .

The Headmen, the great Warriors, all save a few,
Waited still their King's coming, expectant and true,
Amid doubts, rumours, fears, dying hopes; but, deep down,
Through the Sub-Chiefs, throughout all the host, and the town
Was a word flitting aye (the Guard's Chief gave it wing),
"Seek we New Gods? 'twere wiser to seek a New King—
For the state reels with frenzy, and tumult, and dread;
And He comes not who once was King; yea, He is dead."
And the Word month by month flew from man unto man:
And the Priesthood were working, as Priests only can,

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To stay their God's downfall: And many went forth,
Self-exiled, and dwelt in the lands West and North
With their dusky Priest-brethren: and those in the West,
Pricked to heart, muttered wrath: but were fiercely represt
By their White Sovereign's hand, for the love of his child,
His white kindred's Queen. But the Northern priests, wild
With the hatred of races, and hate now of creeds,
Preached war through their vast country's diverse black breeds—
And in secret, in silence, innumerous hosts
Crept snakelike and swift to the White Nation's coasts:
And lurked like a coiled snake, their presence unknown,
When the snow-mountain's Monarch came back to his own.

. . . . . .

Home's love-lights greet him; one face of sweet grandeur,
Perfect from touch of joy's wand; and a face

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Beauteous with glancings of half-tears and laughter,
Lovely as grace follows wavelike on grace.
Now on the worn limbs, and weary worn spirit,
Rest would have breathed as heaven's peace; but the doom
Rose amidst, yea from the bliss of their presence,
Dark as the soul-fires that gnaw amid gloom.
Tenderness fathomless met their glad greeting;
Then his heart shrank, as the tongue strove to tell,
How peril, toil, and pain won but the pang's choice,
'Self's love and Heaven, or Love's truth and Hell!'
Gently the issue was told: And they, moveless,
Clung to him dumbly, with stilled hearts, attent;
Till, as a child's helpless wail ('Oh, thy tortures!
Vainly borne, vainly'), broke Isa's lament.
"Dead," cried the Queen, "are these; but deathless torture
Looms!" (And her voice was as voice of the lyre,
When the soul's agony rings through the handbeat;)
"Honour and truth win the worm and the fire?"
. . . . . .
"Nay let God Himself judge; He is Judge, not the Priest!"

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Spake the King. And, as day died, a star in the east
Gazed on cheeks blanched, then mantling; and watched with set look
As their eyes glowed, or darkened; before the doom-book.
That hour on the frontier, beneath the brake's screen,
Moved the black ambushed tribes without sound and unseen;
And the guards knew no more than the blind knows or feels,
When beneath winter's stillness spring's life-spirit steals,
And resistless flows onward, unmarked and unheard,
Till it leaps forth with pæan of insect and bird;
Thus they thrid their way, ready to dart, and skimmed on:
And the time to resist them flies swift; yea is gone!
Once the Queen breathed, "Dread mutt'rings of treason and bale
Seethed around us, my King, my Own: flesh and heart fail,
Now, now, while we clasp thee restored, and have bliss;

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Yet surely this terror shall pass, even this,
When thy people behold thee." He answered,
"To-night
We confront not man's treason, but God and His
might;
For the weight of the curse numbs and crushes my
brain,
And vain seems all statecraft, and all Kingship vain,
Until God speak the judgment for woe or for weal:
From the Priest's word, O God, to Thy word I
appeal!"
As a man in a wood's mesh caught, lost in the
maze,
Cons all tokens, they ceaselessly scanned text and
phrase,
With eyes as if flame-scorched and hearts all
aflame;
Yet ever anon unto eye and heart came,
Cool as touch of earth's waters, sweet draughts from
God's well,
Restful words; And he cried, as if rending a
spell,
"Oft, full oft, Herald's mouthings have marred the
King's will,
Chiefs have warped the King's mandate to harass
and kill;

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But Thy Word have I searched, Lord, with fear searched ; and lo !
Upon us is no wrath, no denouncement of woe ;
It cries, " Take another's wife, death is the doom ;
Here the death-life, the soul's death beyond the still tomb."
It cries, " Wed again ere thy husband be dead,
And, adulteress, hell is thy soul's spousal bed."
And it cries to the Priest-caste " One Wife." *
But for me
It hath no menace-cry. I and all men are free,
Save the tribe sacerdotal, in God's liberty !
Not on us, not our state, by the Priest held abhorred,
Smites the curse: We are free by Thy † Warrant, O Lord.
And the freedom Thou givest, Lawgiver, shall Man
(As the Judge of his own soul's Judge) scathe with his ban ? "

. . . . . .

Then up from the spirit's dim wastes Godwards leapt
(As a wave, that through midnight has moaningly slept,

* 1 Tim. iii. 2 and 12 ; and Titus 1-6.
† Exodus xxi. 10 ; Deut. xxi. 15, *et passim.*

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Wakes and leaps to the sun from the dark heaving seas)
Their soul's tossing hopes ; whose word-shadows are these :

. . . . . .

'Might of might, when the blast of Thy wrath brake,
Earth rocked, and the heaven's fire-shafts
Clove red through the darkness and shriek of whirled water ;
All tribes of men cowered as a folk led to slaughter :
Thy glaives of fear pierce to their hafts :
We drink of Thy wrath terror-draughts ;
Yea our spirits are rent as by earthquake ;
We cower, we would fain flee to Thee,
As one with one heart-beat in three :
Bid the soul's horror cease, for thine own glory's sake,
O holy, supreme Deity.'

'Spirit-Lord, Liege of Life, the creation
Breathes bliss when Thy smile breaks again :
We know, we give thanks, that Thy largess, life's treasure,
Flows forth from Thine hand as the hours without measure,

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As wind-streams, or flowings of rain:
But, ah! was our soul's presage vain,
That Thy might is our soul's preservation?
From Thee we came forth, and to Thee
As one with one heart-beat we flee:
Take us, Lord; art Thou not all our life and salvation?
O life-giving, blest Deity.'

. . . . . .

O'er their souls passed a voice; a divine hand seemed laid
On their bowed heads; they felt God, and were not afraid,
For their hearts had found rest in His own heart of love;
"Peace!" the voice said, "mine own." They alone know who prove;
They know, could they tell, the tranced rest when the soul,
Made * for God, but long lost, flies love-drawn to its goal.

* Fecisti nos ad Te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te.—*Aug.*

END OF PART III.

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Part IV.

The Alarm, and Farewell; the Battle: The Chief of the Guard and the Queen: The Chief of the Guard and Isa: Treason prevails.

WHO of men knows what souls of men need, joy or anguish?
What nations are ripe for, or worthy, the Truth?
Yea, but They merit, They who make Christ's light yoke grievous,
God's judgment without God's ruth.

. . . . . .

Heaven's own rapture flooded the suppliants' spirits;
But such is not time-born, nor weighed in time's scale;
Hurried steps ringing herald a presence unbidden,
The chief of the guard; corpse-pale
Stood he there, and cried, 'O King, the Lord of the North realm
Is upon us.' 'How near? Where?' 'They forced the blue fords:

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As the snake darts and strikes, they struck: O King, the Lowlands,
Are shambles for murd'rous hordes.'
Isa's eyes fell fear-clouded; the eyes of the Queen
Rested full on the King's, and watched, fearless and keen,
As his words throbbed; 'Your life, my belov'd, the land's fate,
Yonder lies; there I haste; to the iron-hill's gate:
Thou, (ah, woe for the plains—) Thou, who, (Priest) from their place
Spurnest wives, all but one; who wouldst brand and abase
Stainless true women, this thou hast wrought, even Thou!
Woe, woe for the plain's wreck! Death courses: and now
None can see to the end. Let ambassadors fly
To the Queen's Royal Sire, Chief: "Thy child," let them cry,
"Sues, entreats, thee, King, march on our foes' flank, and smite:"
Quick, an escort to guard these safe up to the height:
Quick, a legion to follow me straight to the dell,

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For I dare not pause ; Death hastes ; dear, dear,
wives, farewell !'

. . . . . .

By the tense strain of dread driven, straight as the
bow
Drives the winged death, he reached the ravine
while the foe
Swarmed together beneath, and the chiefs ranged
the host.
He had gone round, seen, cheered every man at
his post,
When a yell quivered up to the dumb moveless
guard,
Like the blent howl of jackal, hyæna, and pard.

" Bound, bound,
To the charge ;
Sound horn and drum,
Clash the targe ;
On, on !

Hie, swift dart,
Through rib-bone and joint ;
O true arrow's point,
To the heart !
On, on !

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Swing, swing the mace,
Crash on the face ;
Sweet are the whoops and the whine,
As the axehead swoops through the spine.
On, on !

Slay ! slay ! slay !
Sweep the pale gods from the land,
Hack the pale insolent hand ;
Then to the prey !
On, on !

Gear for the snatching,
Herds for the catching,
Drink for the lip,
Maid and wife for the grip !
On, on !

On, on !
Clash the targe,
Sound horn and drum ;
Yell, charge ! "

Like the fell ague-grasp, as of live hands that shake
Nerve, and marrow, and brain, a cold horror-clutch brake
The King's soul. 'Oh dear ones !' he moaned ; the ascent

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Heaved with close-thronging spears now, and foes
blood-besprent;
And some well he knew; and strong fury cast
out
The fear-fiend: he shouted, and forth at that
shout,
As the waiting hound springs at his master's quick
cheer,
A crag, poised and ready, was loosed, and sprang
clear.
The headmost foes saw, and had swerved (he
watched hushed);
There was no room; they turned to flee; on the
rear crushed,
And drave them to slaughter: the boulder's last
bound
Echoed loud with a thud; and a dull grinding
sound
And screams told of carnage; and far back the
mass
Smote together and reeled through the jaws of the
pass.

. . . . . .

As at times hunger-maddened a strong wild-dogs'
pack,

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If it cross, dashes recklessly down on the track
Of a leopard ; till fronting his bared teeth and claws,
With the hunt's leader slain, scared and huddled they pause :
Then in wrath, and in hope that by quick deathful blows
He may make vengeance safety, forth darts on his foes
The assailed turned assailant. And thus from the heights
Down leaps the white King, and the steel rends and bites
To the life's core ; red swaths here, and here a corpse-pile
Grow within, and on, outward, far past the defile :
For confusion and panic shake club, dart, and pike,
In the black warriors' hands ; and fierce writhings to strike
Give the dirk's tooth less terror for foeman than friend ;
And the targe and the buckler are vain to defend.
Thus the white swordsmen's buffet and thrust, swift and fell,

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Glide home on the bare guardless bodies: full well
Do the lowlands find vengeance; gore cries unto gore.
Oh God, for the light of a thousand spears more!
For now had the swarth horde been hurled from the plain,
Daunted, scattered, and crushed, ne'er to rally again.
But they come not.

The Queen, in the stillness at home,
Moved restless, and wroth that, as wind-smitten foam,
Thoughts flew whirled, here on hope, here on woe and affright;
When with grey visage fraud-lit, and spirit as night,
Stood the Guards' Chief before her: "The escort, O Queen,
Waits." Half-answering, she tossed in a question between;
"Have the King's succours gone?" Not a change to the eye

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Flits o'er hue or o'er feature, as outrings the lie ;
"Long since; and I doubt not are now 'mid the fight."
"Then the King," she said, "conquers ; what need then of flight ?"
"My orders, Sweet Queen." As a scorpion's sting
His tone stung her. "Why art not thou with the King ?"
"Mine the option, fair Lady, between you and him."
"And the choice was soon made : not to risk life or limb."
"Cruel words ! Thou wouldst surely give pity, not scorn.
Couldst thou know how the spirit ached, smitten and torn
With its yearning for vengeance, and honour and fame,
And the fatherland's safety. But, oh ! canst Thou blame,
If the safety of One seemed more precious than all ?
To be aye with thee, think for thee, be but thy thrall ;
To be sure of thy safety, whatever might chance ;
Be thy guardian ; and haply win one favouring glance,

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Were a joy that—" abruptly he ceased ; for her face
Awed him ; then her voice strove, and rushed :
" Insolent, base,
If not craven, then traitor ; away !" With a stride
He stood, all his visage convulsed, at her side ;
And he half stretched his hand forth : " I go, come thou too."
Quick her arm dipped, and rose, and a poniard's edge threw
A keen glitter full on his unguarded heart.
Surprised, unprepared, he sprang back with a start ;
And his thoughts (while the Queen paused with lifted hand, mute)
Twined as snakes ; 'Shall I spring on her ? Wherefore ? What fruit ?
If I seize her and bear her by force to the tor,
Can I use her ? She spurns me, and soon will abhor,
Soon, when all is known : Yet, e'en in anger, how fair,
And how queenly she stands, watching motionless there :
Ay, but tameless and useless, a peril and snare !'
Then he mouthed, " In my zeal, Queen, it may be I erred :

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But I sought to keep what Thou hast scorned, the King's word."
He turned, and was gone.
And to Isa passed straight:
"Lady," said he, "the guards, by the King's order, wait."
'Which, Thou or the Queen,' thus he mused ere she spoke,
'Is the lovelier?—Thou couldst be bowed to the yoke;
But the lovelier? which? None by rule could decree:
Both are lovely: yet Thou art the lovelier to me.
Let me gain thee, I use thee to mask my design;
And the King, and his God fall; the sceptre is mine.'
"I am ready," she said, her one wish, her lord's will:
And she went forth foreboding not falsehood or ill.
'Praise to thee,' laughed his heart, 'Fetich, God of my land,
Who hast rendered this loveliness unto my hand,
And the realm with her: thanks, praise, on thee I bestow:
And thanks to the alien Priest, too, I owe;
(Faith, of all friends our best friend is full oft a Foe!)

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Thanks, Priest; for thy good word's sake, thanks: as a blight
It smote on the King's ear, and reason and sight
Shrivelled up: how we schemed when he came not: at last
He was there! and we quailed: But he came sore aghast;
Surmised nothing; no yap of rumour he caught;
Watched all the night through, yet scarce questioned of aught;
And is gone vigil-worn now, and still knowing naught:
Let him check, and be checked by, the foe: and his men
Are enough, so I judge; none shall march to the glen,
'Tide whate'er will betide, ere my work is worked out:
For his let is my speed now, his vict'ry my rout.'
As the escort moved on, through the town, past the shrine,
All the old rescue-scene rose, and glowed in love's shine
Before Isa. She trod once again the steep way,
Where her Lord, her Deliverer, bore her that day:

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And she paused on the spot where he made her his Bride.
And the Chief of the Guard, as he strode at her side,
Thought of Him still and thus; 'Send,' he said, and I sent
To the Queen's sire quick: but not the message he meant;
For adieu schemes and life, if the two Kings combine;
And the Word of the Priest (it was truly divine)
Came most apt with a few little touches of mine:
And the Lord of the West now will scarce intervene,
Till he knows if his Daughter be still Wife and Queen.
And yet I, when mine eyes saw the man I deemed dead,
Would have flung plots away; I myself would have led
The relief to the pass: and I doubtless had won
On the foes' bodies pardon for what had been done,
But for thy malediction, O alien Priest.
So then wives are no wives: I care not in the least:

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But, behold! Thou upliftest to home-loving clods
A Render of homes, Priest, as thy God of Gods!
And my cue (thanks to you) is no Penitent's part;
But the watchword and gath'ring cry, now, 'Hearth and Heart:'
And, as all of course see, this sweet Princess, of course,
Now cast off, seeks redress from the Patriot force!
Ah! Fetich mine, strong was the King; we were weak;
Till Thou gavest the strange God's Priest Thy word to speak!'

END OF PART IV.

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Part V.

The issue of the Battle; the royal plume, the emblem of the nation's glory, saved from the foe; the King's fate.

'Flame-lance, javelin, and brand,
Glance and glow,
When the Sun-God layeth his hand
On the Alp-King's helmet of snow:
Even so,
When he toucheth the spirits' core
In his own white warrior band,
Through the rush of the fray and roar
Brand, and javelin, and lance,
Gleam and glance.'

Thus in snatches a chief, here and there, as he smote,
Hand and voice timed together, pealed out the war-note,
Exulting; and many, in faintness and doubt,

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And with hearts dumb, yet gave forth their voice to the shout,
Hoping, still hoping on, that the succours were near ;
And they listened, but never heard answering cheer.
As the Pard 'mid the swirling and howl of the pack,
When his onrush has crippled the wild dogs' attack,
And they fight falt'ring, dazed by the quick darting death,
Is still for a moment, and glowers gath'ring breath ;
And while marking the troop, half in flight, half at bay,
But as ready to fly, feels his strength bleed away.
Thus, pausing, the King, through the chasms of fight,
Saw the victory well-nigh his own ; but the sight
Was despair ; for his people were wounded and spent ;
And he knew it was lost : with a half-charge, a feint,
He drew slowly, gloomily, back t'wards the goil :
And slowly the waves of the foemen recoil ;
Till anon, massing, swelling. the war-surges beat

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Wildly on him; and still he made good his retreat:
And the hindmost pressed up through the gorge, falling back,
And they passed one by one where the crag cramped the track,
At first slowly; soon they swarmed, thrust, clambered, clung;
Then the crag that though stayed, still half-tremblingly hung,
With the weight shakes and lurches. A panic-cry shrills,
And as from a trumpet's throat out from the hills
Booms, and back with the rush of a battering-ram's stroke,
Swung the rear on the vanguard, that shuddered and broke;
And the bands of the subject black tribe in despair
Flung their spears down and fled; and the right wing lay bare.
Vain the King's courage, vain was his chiefs' gallant stand;
Then his voice issuing fell as the flash of a brand
On a warrior near: "Rank is rolled upon rank,
The retreat is blocked, see the wide rent in the flank,

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And I fail. But this plume, by our hero-kings worn,
Must the foe clutch? and trample, or wear it in scorn?
Onwards, deathwards, our warriors dashed where-e'er it waved;
Though I die, let our arms' glory's ensign be saved!
Take it; yon rockwall's cranny, there, see, thou canst win,
Even yet, ere the goring horn's stab crashes in;
There a jaggèd groove leads past their lines round the steep;
Hide the plume-crest; or let the flood take it and keep."
*Quick the Chief took it, quick his speed's utmost he strained;
And another sprang with him: the gap's mouth was gained:
They slipt, but climbed on; darts below, and in front,
And behind, and above, scarred the rock, and fell blunt.
But they 'scaped; few pursued; for with fierce snapping cries,

* England may remember Melville and Coghill at Isandula.

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As the jackal pack presses the quarry that dies,
Pressed the mass on the King, and the two chiefs sped on.
Forth they steal on the champaign ; but ever anon,
When pursuers o'ertake, when fresh foes on the way
Start from grove or from scarp, must they turn them to bay.
On his comrade the plume-bearer stricken leans hard :
They cannot hide, scarcely have strength now to guard
Their priceless freight—tangled their path, foes prowl round.
But they hear as a friend's cheer the river's call sound,
And are roused ; though each step is pain, each marked with blood,
On they force their way through, to where thicket and flood
Seem to flee a black rock ; one in spleen-maddened race,
And one shrinking tim'rously back a rood's space
In a half-ring ; but ere their slow steps touch the tide,
The thickets' boughs jostle, and shriek, and divide,

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Casting forth mingled crest and spear; sharp came the shock;
But they fought, drawing close to the wall of the rock,
With a strength to themselves strange. The foes who lived fled;
And they two were alone in a half-ring of dead.
Then they gave up their charge to the river's on-sweep;
And their work is done: now they may rest them, and sleep.
Tired they sat 'neath the rock's screen, friend leaning on friend,
And, as watching the river still; thus came the end.

. . . . . .

Watchers true! When ye next hear the trumpet wax loud,
And behold the God-King on the fire-rolling cloud,
When before Him adoring but fearless ye stand,
Ye shall hear His 'Well done,' ye shall take at His hand
The guerdon no earth-king can render you now!
(Save me then, Jesus, Lord.)

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As a bull's twyarmed brow
Rips and bears down the hazel copse alder and thorn,
Where a gap points, the white troops were pierced and downborne.
All man's valour could do even now the King. wrought,
But his soul pond'ring, doubting thus, whirled as he fought;
'Is it truth, this wreck? Vict'ry flashed nigh, once, so nigh!'
'Will the Queen's sire yet strike?' 'Ah, the time has flown by!'
'Wherefore came not the troops?' 'Was the conflict too brief?'
'Are they coming: too late?'—'Is it treason?' A chief
Sprang upon him and fell cleft: and lo! battle's gyre
Cast the black Monarch's visage forth, ghastly with ire.
Quick they closed; swift and deft, as from war-masters tried,
Slash and lunge shot, and deftly were stricken aside.
More than peer to his foeman in swordcraft and might,

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Yet the white lord was worn by the watch of the night,
By his soul's fret and strain from its first dark amaze,
By the scath of his journey; his hand or his gaze,
Swerved a moment; at once the foe's blade gashed his breast.
As he staggered, in on him his enemy pressed;
Fresh gashes seamed side, breast, wrist; down dropped his brand;
And he stood all unarmed, scarcely able to stand.
Then (as oft times) thoughts least desired drifted at will:
'Must I lose you?' his heart cried (his heart and limbs thrill),
'Are ye safe, my beloved? Are we, O Christ, cast off?'
'Mid the black monarch's hate grisly joy flung the scoff;
'Ah, I thought to win; scarce hoped this triumph, pale foe.'
Straight the doomed face grew rock, and the heart rock below;
'God Himself gives me strength,' he thought; 'God be my trust.'

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When, long-delayed, surely-aimed, slow, fell the thrust,
Not the victim's he wore, but a conqueror's mien.

. . . . . .

As he sank, on his dark'ning eye glanced his sword's sheen;
With a warrior's last instinct he reached—it was near;
And above it (he marked it) lay crossed a snapt spear:
'Christ's sign?' He breathed. Blood-jets from breast and from side
Spirted free; but he touched, clasped it, bowed him, and died.

O'er the Christian Priest's heart, with cyclone-blasts of pain,
Had the slain King's remembrance swept once and again;
But he saw not the slaughter reek, knew not the loss
That was Christ's, nor his ear heard hell's mock at the cross.
And the thought fenced his soul as with ramparts and towers,

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That at home from his brethren, from all the church powers,
Would the judgment go forth,—'Good and right was thy word;
Thou hast spoken God's truth in the name of the Lord!'

. . . . . .

Oh ye lords of the heathen's fate, conscience, and heart,
Jesus said not, He could not say,—'Rend them apart;
Or fling them as outcasts away from my love!'
Would you give them a fiend for the God-Man above?
Though the Word of the Christ, like the poleaxe's swing,
Keen-bright as its flash, and as sharp as its ring
On an idol's trunk, shatters their life to the base,
Europe's crowds unabashed flaunt His name to His face.
They covet, defame, defraud, yea, in heart slay,
And laugh with adulterous lips: Christ's are They?
Not the King unforsworn? Not the souls crystal-white,
Love-hallowed, law-hallowed, wives pure in God's sight?

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But the Pashas of souls cry 'Bow down to Our laws,
Or perish, ye Heathen!' Ay, perish, Christ's cause?
To the Fetich of Europe's traditions they bind,
And with thongs curs'd as Pilate's, the Lord of Mankind!

END OF PART V.

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Part VI.

The flight of the Chief of the Guard and Isa; the fate of the Queen; Isa in the hands of the enemy.

UPWARD, trembling, but knowing not aught that had chanced,
Isa fled with her escort, and now had advanced
To where, zoned with craig-spears, lay a platform of green;
There she stopped, and looked wondering round for the Queen.
Heaths in patches blazed near, and the buttercup's gold;
And forget-me-nots nestled, where o'erarched and cold
Quired a streamlet, and raced like the cool mountain blast.
While they let her snatch rest scattered groups hurried past

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Some with babes, some with goods laden, some
driving flocks:
On the traitor's soul thought after thought smote
as shocks,
'She is mine now: but, ah, can the King hold the
glen?
How I erred in not sending a few hundred men?
Shall I press on, or haste at once back to the
town,
And secure the troops there?' Quick he turned
and hied down.
While Isa still tarries, there floats up, and strays
On the waves of her thoughts' flood a shred of old
lays:

'Blind on the cliff's sheer brow,
Blinded with slash of the wind and rain,
Thou, love thou:
I safe on the plain.

"Back," I beckon and cry;
Nought hearest thou but the storm-sling's hiss;
And thine eye
Sees not the abyss.

Oh, would
That we stood

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With our hands there twin'd,
Love, love, though we both were blind!'

He had toiled past the break in the snow-mountain's slope.
Past the tableland; on to the forest-wrought cope
Of the hill, to whose waist's arc and half cinctured feet
Clung the city, square, palace, and temple, and street.
And he looked from the ridge, forth; and saw on the plain
Bands outmoving: He saw that his coming was vain.
For the chiefs of the garrison dazed by alarms,
And left without orders, had called them to arms,
Harangued them, and hastily marched for the fight.
With a grim gaze he watched; ere they passed from his sight,
All the far downs were mottled with swift, scudding spots;
And o'er the horizon's rim flickering blots
Followed ever, like strips of clouds flung by a breeze:
And they chase, blend, and part; and again chase and seize,

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And sever; but some he saw never more stir:
And the bands from the town, looming now like a blur,
Met the on-rushing shades, and were wrapped close, and thrilled:
And awhile (was it moments or hours?) all seemed stilled
In the inner gloom's ring to the keen watching eyes;
Then it wavers, and rolls into tatters, and flies.
He scanned it, and heart and lip writhed with disdain:
'Fools to go forth! ye ran unto death, and are slain;
Fools!' he cried. Then his face changed, for lo! a dark core
Grew again 'mid the swirl, and right onward it bore,
As adown the wind's path; onward yet; then was cleft,
And the bulk still came swiftly, part swerved to the left.
And, 'they wheel,' he thought, 'round for the town's flank attack;'
No; too far they break off, and away to the track
That by short rocky passes darts upwards, and creeps

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In between the first heights and the uppermost steeps.
As he marked it, his eyes blenched, and fell, and below
They fell on the helpless town waiting the foe,
Ruin, outrage, and slaughter, and brought there by him;
And they flinched as if scorched, and a moment grew dim.
Then his own fear slew pity; and wrath and hate rose,
And he fled, with a curse, for the Alp-peak of snows.

. . . . . .

But nigher, and nigher aye, whirled the storm-rush,
Pursuers and fugitives, one madden'd crush,
Dashing forward; on gate and on barrier they dash;
The strong breastwork holds not; the gates sway and crash;
The guards break. And death ranges free, street by street,
Fire and rapine and brute-lust resistless and fleet.

. . . . . .

To her home's porch the Queen had sped; there stood; her face

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Pale and set, but divine in its exquisite grace:
Whither, how should she 'scape? With a low gasping cry
She caught at a pillar: 'King, husband, I die;
And in horror unbearable. Where art thou? Where?'
She knew not she cried to the dead. All the air
Is a shriek, and a quiver of flame and smoke-surge,
And amidst it man-devil-shapes yell, dive, emerge,
Scattering javelins and firebrands. She clings and is still;
Even thus (it is habit perchance more than will),
Backward down the mind's dim gulphs her own peril flows;
And his fate fills her soul; and as Self ceased, uprose
Her form's glorious stature erect: not a word
Broke the mouth's curve; her eyes, all life, hunt for her lord.
But far other, yea, and things life-like and swift,
Are hunting, and cease not; and through the gloom-drift,
Where its folds veer and coil round a red flashing hole
Skims a chance arrow, swift and straight, choosing its goal,

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And strikes ; and slides out through the sweep of
the flank :
Wide the blood-sluice gaped, draining her strength ;
and she sank.
A chief, fleeing, paused, and she half-raised her
head,
And murmured, 'The King?' 'Slain!' he cried :
'slain!' and fled.
A dull strange content comes, and numbness of
pain ;
And fear and all sorrow swim dream-like and
vain ;
And visions are substance ; the cries and flames'
roar
Are as wind-chants o'er streams; and she meets
Him once more!
Thus she lay 'midst the havoc, dream-folded,
serene,
Till her soul to the dream's truth passed, ever a
Queen.

Her country's betrayer, afar up the height,
Vaulted on, clambered on, as a beast mad with
fright,

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When a smoke-column shot o'er the town's forest-screen ;
And a flaming sword waved where the city had been.
And now on the third bluff above him he views
Isa borne by her guards. With caught breath, with strained thews,
He reached them ; and fiercely he urged them along.
The road now was choked, but the escort was strong ;
And they thrust without ruth, and trod down young and old ;
But now through the hills' sudden sharp break, behold !
The-foe swarms up, slantways, below them as yet :
But unclogged is the foe's path, their own way beset.
Then in fury he struck at the mass ; wound or slay,
What reck? "Smite," he yelled, "let the sword cleave a way."
But minute by minute escape's chance grows less ;
And Isa's guards wearily rive through the press.

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All else then, all pity, his hope of a hold
On the kingdom through her, and his love-lust, turned cold.
"Follow; leave her; each look to his own life," he cried.
Freed, forwards they bounded.

. . . . . .

She, lone 'midst the tide
That battled and battered, was dashed to and fro,
Faint and bruised. With a rush and a war-whoop the foe,
As the onlift nigh bore her to where the paths meet,
Streaming o'er the last ledge, charged, and snapt the retreat.

. . . . . .

He had hewn his way past, saved his life for a time,
To prey upon foe and friend, blazon his crime;
And die by a traitor's stab.

. . . . . .

Back she was flung;
Then a grasp, trap-like, wrenched her; a battle-axe swung;
She shrieked as it soared and flashed high o'er her head.

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But a random blow struck on the wielder's neck; dead
He fell forward on her; and deathly with fright
She swooned, and the giant-frame hid her from sight.

. . . . . .

Soon the whole space grew silent, and past, and away,
Up the steeps, down the slopes, sped the slayers to slay.
All who flee down death reaps; knot by knot falls the rear;
And the hill base is rampired by javelin and spear.
And the fleers above, frantic, huddled like sheep,
Fall. But lo! on the track was a small half-fenced keep;
And there, wise as brave, 'mid the wreck of the flight,
Two youthful chiefs, war-leaders born, lords of fight,
With a scant hero-band toiled and strengthened their post,
And fearlessly fronted the conquering host.

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And the fierce hordes swing up hour by hour to attack,
Lashed to fury, and hour after hour are flung back;
Then in one last, grand charge, flesh-and-blood's utmost strain,
They are foil'd; and the vanquish'd are victors again.
Thus the remnant are saved, and the mountain bars close
Strong around them, and round them the strength of the snows.

That eve, from the conflict retiring, a chief
Mark'd a friend's body, bent down a moment in grief,
Saw the hand trembling: 'Could it be life kept its hold?'
He shifted it; sideways it fell stiff and cold,
But beneath lay a face moveless now as the slain;
He saw it, and instantly knew it again;
For in days of past peace, at the white Monarch's court,

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He had once found a welcome with revel and sport;
And had seen her grace glance like the pale orchid's light,
As a foil to her sire's massy sinews, and height,
And strong stately front: And the eyes of his heart
Held the vision, that never, till death, shall depart.
Quick he caught her up; there in his arms as a child
Unconscious lay Isa, asleep: once she smiled,
Dreaming other arms held her. He carried her down:
In a cactus-brake's gap close below the knoll-crown,
Where, watching the battle, the traitor had stood,
He laid her. And straight hurried on through the wood;
For he dared not delay his report to the King:
But he never returned: for a lurking foe's spring
From a covert sped true as the poised python's own:—
Then the slayer's eyes gloat where his hacked corpse is thrown.

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In the dawn Isa woke, rose still dazed from her swoon,
Pluck'd some berries and ate, and then rested; but soon,
While she traced out the dim-felt woe, how it befell,
All the hillside and wood echoed, yell answering yell:
Plunging into each thicket, each tuft, as a hound,
Ranged the foe: they are close; they leap in; she is found.

END OF PART VI.

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Part VII.

Isa's doom; the day of the sacrifice: Then the glad final meeting beyond death. Heaven is gained, and neither wife lost.

Tusk-like teeth, eyeballs red as the faces fresh gashed,
And lithe ebon limbs ochre-streaked, and gore-splashed,
Thronged around: 'To the spoil-givers give ye the dues,'
Bayed a voice as a dog's. 'The quick eye, the strong thews,'
Thus a chief cried with roar of a chafed buffalo,
'Give the spoils, or wouldst deify spear-staff and bow?'
Fierce and instant the counter-yell: 'Have gods ye must:
And the god that is strongest of all gods is Lust!

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And his let her be: His!'

(The howl shrills and grows.)

Isa's brain spikes of fire, Isa's body chill throes,
Pierced, and rent, and benumbed; and her eyes waxed and froze.
And her spirit's self seemed to be lost, rapt away,
In the stress of her anguish of prayer: 'Save or slay;
O my God, hear.' She felt nought; she knew nought but this,
Though they held her, and mocked. Then a cobra-like hiss
Cleft and startled the pack; for the words were the King's:
We are strong, lust is stronger, Death strongest of things.
And he, time's high monarch, has given us this hour.
Ask ye yon bleeding head unto whom went its power?
Unto Death. Let us give then to Death for his grace,
This, the crushed nation's choicest in mien and in place.
Back; let none henceforth touch her; no, not with a breath—

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She is Death's; and who touches her now touches Death.'

'God has heard her,' her heart cried.

. . . . . .

Then they led her away,

Down afar to a strange land, and still, day by day,

Though the dense heat-damps wrapped her, close-clinging to press

The life's spirit out (oh for one, one caress

Of the snow-mountain's breeze, crisp, and joyous, and swift),

Though in darkness her soul seemed to swoon and to drift;

Yet, for aye, 'mid the storm-bursts of sorrow and dread,

Shone the thought, 'God has heard; pure I go to my dead.'

They who joy over ruin, as bridegroom o'er bride,

Through deserts, through spume-wreaths of pestilence, glide,

O'er the land's length and breadth; it is theirs wholly now!

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Save the refuge-ring drawn round the snow-mountain's brow.
Not a herd is left; no living soul now; the steed
Has been slain as an ill thing, a half-demon breed;
All the homesteads are ashes, all crops; the woods burn;
Scream of prey-bird and beast tracks the victors' return.
But at home peals a realm's voice in triumph and praise;
And the day of the sacrifice crowns the joy-days!

. . . . . .

The victim comes—down the troops' deep double ranks,
In whose rear human streams sway and plunge on their banks
Flood-like, on she is led—and the roar and the swell
Confuse her and stun; and it surely is well,
Well that ear should not hear, or eye see, or brain think.
From her one simple vesture's snow blushed lily-pink
Arms, and shoulders, and ankles; her forehead was rayed

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By a tress, whose gold links and brown blent in one braid ;
And, save that beneath it a soft ringlet strayed,
All her hair thrown back flowed down beyond her robe's hem.
At her side soared a moment a young palm-tree's stem,
Bending t'wards her, and o'er her its tender fronds hung.
As its fay's self she seemed, graceful, drooping, and young.
Then at tymbal's and horn's larum-crash the voice-clang
Smitten fell, and the chant of the Priests, as they sang,
Gathered in on her, broken in parts, partly clear ;
But the close rang distinct, bringing thought back and fear.

'By the knife, and the fire,
Take the prize unto thee ;
To thine ire,
Or desire,
Whichsoever it be ;
Strong King, Thou manifold Power !
She is Thine, oh Death, to deflower ;

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She is Thine, if Thou wilt, to devour;
Or to keep as Thine own, and forever,
Seeing none may draw near to gainsay or deliver.'

. . . . . .

Horror-led she had searched all death's agony through,
Oft, how oft; but not this! Not this fear-spectre new,
Living Death! Shall it watch flesh and soul shrink and part,
Shall the live reaching arms, and the ghastly live heart
Take her fresh from the slaughter-knife, cowering, a prey,
Rent from love, to be lone with this foul thing, for aye?
'No escape,' she moaned, shudd'ring, 'no hope: I was saved
Once! He saved me! how god-like he looked, when he braved
Idol, Priests, and mob: Death in his eyes flamed and life.
But they met mine love-hued. His I was, prize, and wife,
And possession; all his. Ah! not his now. And he?

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Is he captive or slain? Were he living and free
He would win to me even yet, save me or die.
Then, as frenzied, as though it could be, with a cry,
She flashed her gaze round. Myriad faces of hate,
And of joy she saw; then on the mid-temple gate,
She beheld, black and eyeless, His head, whom she sought!
Voice and soul, ere she shrieked, sank: and all was as nought.

. . . . . .

They held her, and forward bore; beam by beam creeps
The soul's light back trembling amid the gloom-deeps;
And the words, 'God has heard,' woke, and pulsed in her brain,
Ever wild'ringly on, as a half-caught refrain.
And she raised herself up.

. . . . . .

With such grace, with such eyes,
Might some star-child, down-strayed, in her dawn of surprise,

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Look, and seeing perceive not what these earth-scenes are,
Until thought grows, and pain for her lost home afar.

. . . . . .

A hand's sudden grasp on the bright rippling hair
Drew the head back; the white throat shone out round and bare;
Then a hand gliding wheeled with a turn of the wrist;
And the knife, as it turned, ah! the cruel sun kist!
As a babe shudders touched by the font's water-plash,
Shrank the soft woman's flesh at the cold edge's gash:
But, gently stilled, soon the babe's limb-throb is o'er;
And soon, yea and gently, her chrism of gore.

Throne-like glitters the great flame's breast,
Amber, and azure, and red;
What rosebed can vie with its splendour?
What Queen's marriage-bed?

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Yea, these lie pulseless, opaque,
Deathlily cold,
But the flame's clear bosom heaves, rife
With a free, strong, surging of life,
With passion thirst uncontrolled,
That never possession's self, destruction alone, can slake.

. . . . . .

Slowly they lift, they cast the slight limbs
Full on the altar-pyre;
An instant gleamed statue-like beauty
Pale through the flush of the fire.
Fire that shall one day wrap
The sin-spotted body of earth,
Till it rise, as it rose not from washing of waters,
New in immortal birth.
Never lip-froth or slime of the crawling worm,
Never taint of the foul dank mould,
Nor loathly decay, shall dishonour that form:
Amid incorruptible gold,
Dazzling, 'mid voice of acclaim, priests' chant, and the incense-roll,
Growing into the radiance of light,
Transfigured, it melted from sight,
Viewless and pure as the soul.

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Afar in the kingdom oft dreamt of,
Oft seen by faith's cloud-cleaving glance,
But pressed with the footfall of flesh by two only,
Stood she as wakened from trance,
Safe, and for ever,
In Christ's own land.
Earth's grace's excellence, fresh from God's hand,
Land-charm, and stream-shine, and brilliance of skies,
Blending, were blurs to the glory of beauteousness
Suddenly flung on her spirit and eyes.
Fair as the opal's beams,
Bright'ning to diamond gleams,
Softly the river
Sang the life-song.
Mortals had quailed at the beauty's strange perfectness;
She, to whose being perfections belong,
Found there her rest. Spirit-voices of melody
Came on the winglets of spice-scented breath,
Earthly sense never knew sweetness so subtly sweet;
Yea, could it know, very sweetness were death.
. . . . . .
Shimmer'd and brake into beryl the life-tree's emerald shade-depths,

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Lustred by forms where Elohim's Shechina-rays
fell and abide:
Thus once again, past the veil of earth's blindness,
the glare of death's horror,
Met they, bliss-filled, as creation is filled with its
swift ether tide;
Three ever one in the Triune Jehovah, love-crown'd,
deified.

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